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# Teacher librarians: leading, connecting and innovating



**Jane McKenzie,**  
Assistant Principal  
and teacher  
librarian at  
Quirindi Public

*School, describes her role as a collaborative leader and shares some of the ways that she works with students and staff to incorporate ICT in teaching and learning.*

*Librarians are almost always very helpful and often almost absurdly knowledgeable. Their skills are probably very underestimated and largely underemployed.*

Charles Medawar (1978)

**I** believe that teacher librarians make the ideal candidate as a leader in any school, whether it is as principal, part of the executive team or as a teacher. Teacher librarians are experts in their:

- knowledge of the curriculum
- understanding of current teaching pedagogy, such as *Guided Inquiry*, *Quality Teaching*, resource based learning and constructivism
- ability to lead and develop collaborative teams
- ability to incorporate the use of cutting edge ICTs and work in a connected environment
- knowledge and understanding of all students in the school.

## Collaboration

*Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration wonderful things can be achieved.*

Mattie Stepanek

As the Assistant Principal and teacher librarian at Quirindi Public School, I have had opportunities to provide professional learning for all staff members. During the last few years this has seen:

- staff members developing a shared understanding of the role of the teacher librarian
- collaboratively planned units of work incorporating inquiry based learning (IBL) and technology
- a more flexible approach to timetabling in the Information Centre (our library)
- all teachers developing an understanding of IBL (Figure 1).

Workshops with all staff members were given to provide a background of the main components of IBL (Gordon, 2009). Classroom teachers then worked with a learning partner to develop a unit of work that incorporated the IBL pedagogy. Units of work were shared with staff members becoming *critical friends* and giving feedback on all units of work. Teachers then implemented their units. Informal feedback from teachers included:

*Students were engaged and on task! I want to do more of this.*

*Students developed a deeper understanding and knowledge of a topic.*

*The questions students asked ranged from lower order to higher order; more open ended.*

*Even though I thought it would be too hard for my students, they showed me that they needed a challenge like this.*

## What are our 21<sup>st</sup> century tools for creating inquiry-based learning tasks?

- Critical thinking skills
- ISP
- Guided Inquiry
- Authentic learning tasks
- Performance-based assessments
- Evidence-based teaching
- Web 2.0 tools



Figure 1 What are our 21<sup>st</sup> century tools for creating inquiry-based learning tasks? A slide from Dr Carol Gordon's PowerPoint presentation: The school library: a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom? (2009) which is available at <[www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/teachingideas/isp/k\\_6/index.htm](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/teachingideas/isp/k_6/index.htm)>

*There was concern that the required syllabus content wouldn't be covered but, as teachers implemented the unit of work, they found in most cases they were teaching at or above where the syllabus required.*

*As students brainstormed their questions, they began to see where gaps in their knowledge were and posed more questions to ensure these gaps were addressed.*

## Incorporating ICTs in teaching and learning: working in the connected environment

*In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us to swim.*

Linton Weeks (2001)

At Quirindi Public School, we have endeavoured to ensure that all staff and students have access to new and emerging ICTs by providing targeted professional learning in 2009. This has largely been possible through our involvement in the Quality Teaching Indigenous Project (QTIP). The focus of QTIP for 2009 was technology, which enabled us to use this funding to develop staff members' capacity in ICTs. Our focus has been on how to effectively incorporate technology into the classroom teaching, learning and assessing cycle. Throughout the year, opportunities have been provided to work with the teacher librarian and their learning partner with the intended outcome being to upskill all staff. During this time teachers have:

- used online encyclopaedias
- developed teaching and learning activities using SMART Notebook software for use with our interactive whiteboards
- participated in workshops during Term 3 to develop a better understanding of the functions and features of Notebook and its use in classrooms
- had an in-depth look at *TaLe*, especially The Learning

Federation, Sites2See and the resources

- learnt about and implemented wikis into professional and classroom practice; a teacher implemented the use of a wiki as part of her IBL unit
- provided opportunities for students to participate in a number of videoconferences, from NASA to Sydney schools partnerships (Figure 2 & Figure 3)
- been involved in the cuddie-cuddie project, in which students share their digital stories with others around the world
- supported students in a variety of WebQuests and internet based activities (Figure 4 & Figure 5), including *Murder under the microscope*.

Being a rural school, we have found that our connected classroom (Figure 2) has opened up the world to our students and teachers. Our school community is able to participate in activities with Sydney schools, Yetman Public School, Wombat Public School, Mornington Island School and many other schools and communities. Without our connected environment, this involvement would not have occurred. The decision to place the connected classroom in the

**The connected classroom offers a wonderful opportunity for teacher librarians to train and collaborate with teachers and students.**

Information Centre has enabled access for every student and staff member in our school. We have recently connected with a school in Hong Kong where we will run videoconferences with all 13 of our classes to share cultural, technological and IBL projects. The connected classroom offers a wonderful opportunity for teacher librarians to train and collaborate with teachers and students. It is an exciting time to teach and learn in our schools.



Figure 2 & Figure 3 Videoconferencing connects students to experts in their field and to other schools



Figure 4 Students confidently engaged in online learning...

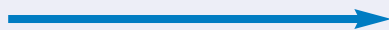
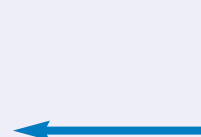


Figure 5 Connected...



Figure 6 ... and connecting with other schools



## In conclusion

*Leadership is not about skills, rules or procedures, but about the person and the quality of their relationship with others.*

Murgatroyd & Gray (1984)

As Assistant Principal, I believe the skills I have learnt as a teacher librarian have made me better at my job, a better leader and collaborator. Looking through the domains of the *School leadership and capability framework*, it is obvious that teacher librarians may possess and develop many, if not all, of the leadership capabilities. Such as:

- professional values and ethics
- personal strengths and commitment to ongoing personal and professional development

- effective communication
- productive relationships
- pedagogical knowledge
- pedagogical application
- building an environment that maximises learning
- building a school vision and culture
- strategic planning
- building of leadership
- advocacy
- operating effectively within a regulatory and organizational framework
- personnel
- management of resources to achieve goals
- managing systems and processes.

Adapted from Executive Leadership Development Project  
<[www.sydneyr.det.nsw.edu.au/support/proflearning/leadership/index.htm](http://www.sydneyr.det.nsw.edu.au/support/proflearning/leadership/index.htm)>

Questions often asked are, *what do teacher librarians do?* and *why do we need qualified teacher librarians?* My response is, when you look at the plethora of roles that teacher librarians have in schools, particularly in terms of leadership and information literacy for the digital age, what would we do without them! ■

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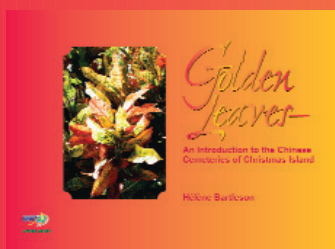
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